

Num 22-2 to 25-9 Torah Reading (Parshat Balak)
English version to be sung to the Torah tropes by Len Fellman
Latest version July 1, 2020

22:2 It was seen by Balak, [son of Tzippor]: everything that had been done by Israel to the Amorites.

3 Fearful was Moab [from the presence] [of the people] exceedingly, because [many they were].

[Dread & loathing] [seized Moab] before the children of Israel.

4 Then said Moab to the elders of Midian, “[Now we’re going to see] [how they will chew up]—this *kahal* (this mass of people)— everything [around us], [just as chews up] an ox all the grass of the field.

[Now it happened that Balak] [son of Tzippor] was king over Moab, at the time that we speak of.

5 So he sent some messengers to Balaam [son of Beor] [to the place known as Pethor],

[a place which was on] [the River Euphrates] in the land of his kinfolk, [summoning him], [speaking these words]: “[You are hereby informed]: A people [who came out] Egypt [are seen to have] covered the surface of the land, and have now settled right near me.

6 [Therefore now] go, I pray, curse for me this nation—[this people]—[since too strong] it is for me. Perhaps I am able to [strike at it] and drive it out of the land, since [I truly do know] that whomever you bless [is blessed indeed], and whomever you curse [is surely cursed].

7 There went to Balaam the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian, [holding spells] [in their hand].

They came to Balaam, and they spoke to him the words of Balak.

8 And he [responded to them], “[Lodge with me] here [this night]. [I will bring back] [to you] an answer [according to what] there speaks YHWH to me.” So they stayed—the chiefs of Moab—with Balaam.

9 Then came *Elohim* to Balaam, [and spoke these words], “[Tell me, who] are the men that are here [with you]?”

10 To this replied Balaam to God (*Elohim*), “Balak [the son of Tzippor] king of Moab, sent me this word:

11 ‘[There is] a people [who came out] of Egypt, [who have covered] the breadth of the land.

[So now I ask you]: [go and put a curse] for me on this people. [Perhaps I] [will be able] to do battle against them, [and drive them out].’ ”

12 And replied *Elohim* to Balaam, “You shall not go with them.

Do not put a curse on this people, [end aliyah] because truly blessed [are they indeed].”

22:13 [And so got up] Balaam in the morning, and said to the chieftains of Balak, “[Go back] to your land, [since God] refused: YHWH [won’t allow me] to go with you.”

14 [So they rose up]—the chieftains of Moab—and they came to Balak, and [they said to him], “Balaam has refused to go with us.”

15 And once again, Balak sent some chieftains, more numerous and honored than the others.

16 They came to Balaam, and said [this to him], “[Thus says] to you Balak son of Tzippor, ‘Do not, pray, hold back, from coming to me.’”

17 I will honor [and reward you] greatly, and whatever you say to me, I will do. [Just go—I pray]: [put a curse for me] on this people.”

18 And answered Balaam, saying to the servants of Balak, “[If he offered me]—[if Balak should give]—the fill of his house, of silver and gold, [I would not] [be able to] [go against] the word of YHWH my God to do anything either small or great.

19 [And so now], abide I pray [here, in this place]—[also you]—tonight, that [I may know] what further words YHWH will speak to me.”

20 Then came Elohim |—[God came to Balaam] [in the night] and said [this to him],

“[If it is] [to call you] that they came—the men—arise and go with them.

[But only] [that very word] [end aliyah] that I speak to you is what you must do.”

21 [And rose up] Balaam in the morning, and he saddled his donkey, and he went with the chieftains of Moab.

22:22 [Then flared up the wrath] [of Elohim] because [he was going]. [An angel took his stand]—a messenger [from YHWH]—in the road, to bar his way. Balaam was riding on his donkey, and his two lads [were with him].

23 [But she saw]—[the donkey could see]—the angel of YHWH standing [there in the road] [with a sword] [that was unsheathed], [in his hand].

[So she veered off]—the donkey—[from the road], [and she went off] into the field.

[But she was beaten] by Balaam: he struck the donkey [to turn her back] to the road.

24 And there stood the angel of YHWH in the footpath [through the vineyards], with a fence on one side, and a fence on the other.

25 And again saw the donkey the angel of YHWH, [pressing herself] [against the wall], [and pressing in turn] the leg of Balaam to the wall.

[And once again], [he beat her].

26 Moving ahead, the angel of YHWH [passed by],

and stood in a place that was narrow—[a place in which] there was no room to turn, right or left.

22:27 [And again saw] the donkey the angel of YHWH. [She crouched down] underneath Balaam.

[Then flared up the anger] of Balaam, who this time struck the donkey [with his staff].

28 Then opened YHWH the mouth of the donkey,

[and she said] to Balaam, “[What have I done] to you that you [should have struck me] these three times?”

29 [And replied] Balaam to the donkey, “You have played games with me.

[If there had been] a sword [in my hand], by now [I would have killed you].”

30 Then spoke the donkey—[speaking to Balaam]—“[Is it not true] that I am your donkey, of whom [you have ridden on me] [your whole life] up till this day? [Have I ever been] in the habit of doing to you such things?” [And Balaam answered], “No.”

31 Then uncovered [by YHWH] were the eyes of Balaam, [so that he could see] the angel of YHWH standing on the road, his sword unsheathed in his hand. Balaam knelt and bowed down on his face.

32 [There spoke then] [to him] the angel of YHWH, “[To what end] did you strike this, your donkey, all these three times?

[You must know] that I [have come out] [to oppose you], since pressing was the mission [upon Me].* Acc. to Baruch Levine, Anchor Bible ‘Numbers’

33 I was seen by the donkey, which turned [away from Me] these three times.

[If she had not] turned [away from Me], then [as of now] it is you I would have killed; *her* I would have let live.”

34 Then replied Balaam to the angel of YHWH, “[Surely I have sinned], [since indeed] I [did not know]

[that you were there], standing to meet me in the road. [But as it is now], if it is bad in your eyes, then it’s back home for me.”

35 [To this responded] the angel of YHWH to Balaam, “Go with the man.

[But nothing except] [for the exact word] that I will speak to you—[it alone] [you shall do].” And so went Balaam with the chieftains of Balak.

36 When it was heard by Balak that Balaam had come, he went out to meet him in [the town of Moab],

that lies by the border of Arnon, that is at the edge of the territory.

37 Then said Balak to Balaam, “[Is it not true] [that I sent a message]—[that I sent] for you, [to summon you]? Why did you not come to me? Am I indeed not able [to reward you]?”

38 And replied Balaam to Balak, “[You can see that I have come] [to you]. [But even now], am I indeed able to say just anything?

[Only those words]—the words [that have been put] [by Elohim] [end aliyah] [into my mouth], these will I speak.

22:39 And so went off Balaam with Balak, and they came to Kiryath Chatzoth.

40 Then slaughtered Balak some cattle and sheep. [He sent them] to Balaam and to the chieftains that were with him.

41 And it was in the morning: [he took him]: Balak [went with Balaam], [and brought him] [to the high places] of Baal, and he could see from there the edge of the mass of people.

23:1 [Then there spoke] Balaam to Balak, “Build for me here [seven altars] for slaughter, and ready [for me] here seven bulls, and seven rams.”

2 And so [Balak did] just as it was spoken by Balaam. [Then offered up] Balak [together with Balaam] a bull and a ram on each altar.

3 Then said Balaam, [speaking to Balak], “[Station yourself] [by your burnt offering], [while I move about]. [Maybe it will be]: [I will be met] by YHWH—[God will encounter me]. If something whatever He will show me, I will tell it to you. And he went off by himself.

4 And he was met by *Elohim*: [God came to Balaam].

And Balaam [said this to God], “The seven altars [I have set up]. [I have offered up] a bull and a ram [on each altar].”

5 [And there was placed] [by YHWH] words in the mouth of Balaam. [What God said is this]:, “Go back to Balak, and thus shall you speak.”

6 [And he went] [back to him], and saw him still stationed [by his burnt offerings]—he and all the chieftains of Moab.

7 He took up his *mashal* (parable, proverb) by saying, “[From Aram I was brought]. I was led by Balak [king of Moab] [from the hills of the east]. [Balak said, 'go]: [put a curse for me] on Jacob. Go, and denounce Israel.”

8 How [can I curse] who was *not* cursed by God (*Elohim*)? How [shall I denounce] one not denounced by YHWH?

9 [Since from the top] of the rocks [I do see them], [and from the hills] [I behold them].

[I see there a people] [that apart] [surely dwells]. [Among the nations] it does not count itself.

10 [Indeed who has] measured the dust of Jacob? [Who has counted] the issue of Israel?

[May there die] my soul the death of the upright, and may my end [be like his].”

11 [Then said] Balak to Balaam, “What have you done to me? To curse my enemies [I took you], [and I see], you have only blessed.”

12 [Balaam answered] like this,

“[Is it not so]: [that word alone] which was placed by YHWH [in my mouth], [end aliyah] that I will take care to speak.”

23:13 Responding to him [Balak said this], “Go pray, with me to a place that is different, [in that] [you will see them] from there; only [the near edge of them] [you will see]: [the whole of them] [you will not see]. [Curse them for me] from there.”

14 [Balak took him] to the Field of Watchmen* at the top of the cliff, *according to Everett Fox

and he built seven altars, [where he offered up] a bull and a ram [on each altar].

15 [Balaam said] to Balak, “Station yourself here [by your burnt offering], while I seek an encounter there.”

16 [And he was met] by YHWH—[God appeared to Balaam] and placed some words in his mouth, [saying to him], “Go back to Balak, and thus shall you speak.”

17 [And so Balaam] [came to him], [and found that] he was stationed by [his burnt offering]. The chieftains of Moab, [were with him]. And speaking [to him], [Balak said], “[What is the word] of YHWH?”

18 Balaam took up his *mashal* (parable, proverb) [and said]: “[Rise up], Balak, and listen—give ear to me, son of Tzippor.

19 Not a man is God (*El*), [that He be capricious], [not a human] [that he would relent].

[Indeed would He] say, and not perform? Speak, [and yet not fulfill]?

20 In truth it is to bless, [that I was summoned]. [Bless I must]—I cannot revoke it.

21 [He has not beheld] evil in Jacob, and sees no trouble in Israel.

YHWH his God [is with him]. The *t'ruah* (trumpet blast) of the king, [is in their midst].

22 [Since *El* (God)] [brought them out] from Egypt, they are like the horns of the wild ox, to him.

23 [For there is no] divining in Jacob; [there is no magic] in Israel.

[All at once it is known]: [it is told] to Jacob and to Israel [what is being done] by God (*El*).

24 [Behold a people]: [like a feline] it arises; [like a lion] [it rears itself up].

[It will not] lie down till it devours its prey, [and the blood of its kill], it drinks.

25 [Now said] Balak to Balaam, “[If it is to curse], do [not curse them]. [If it is to bless], do not bless them.”

26 And responded Balaam, speaking to Balak, “[Is it not true] [that I spoke] to you, saying,

“[All of the words] [end aliyah] that are spoken by YHWH, just this will I do.”

23:27 [And replied] Balak to Balaam, “[Go, pray]—I [will take you] to a place—[someplace else].

Perhaps [it will be right] in the eyes of *ha Elohim* [for you to curse them for me, from there.]

28 So he took him—Balak [went with Balaam] to the top of Peor, overlooking the face of the wasteland.

29 [Then said] Balaam to Balak, “Build for me here seven more altars, and prepare me [at this place] seven bulls and seven rams.

30 And so did Balak [just as] it was asked by Balaam, [and he offered up] a bull and a ram [on each altar].

24:1 It was seen [by Balaam] that [good it surely was] in the eyes of YHWH to bless Israel,

so he did not go about as in each time before, in search of omens. Rather turned toward the desert, [he set his face].

2 Then lifted up Balaam [his eyes, whereupon] he saw Israel dwelling [by their tribes].

And there came upon him *ruach Elohim* (the spirit of God).

3 He took up his *mashal* (parable, proverb) and he said, “The speech of Balaam son of Beor, speech of the man who is open-eyed.

4 [The speech of one] who hears [the sayings of *El*],

who the sight of *Shaddai* (the Almighty) [sees in visions]: [bowed down], [though unveiled are his eyes].

5 How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwellings, O Israel.

6 [Like palm groves] [stretched out]; like gardens by a river; like aloes planted by YHWH; like cedars by the water.

7 [Dripping water] from their boughs, their root* in waters abundant. *acc. to Robert Alter

Greater than Agag is their king; [lifted high] is their kingship.

8 [Since *El* (God)] [brought them out] from Egypt, they are like the horns of the wild ox to him.

[Indeed he consumes] nations [who are his foes]. [Even their bones] he crushes, and their loins he smashes.

9 He crouches [and he lies down] [just like a lion], [and like a feline]: [who would dare] rouse him?

[Those who bless you] are blessed; [those who curse you] are cursed.

10 Then flared [the wrath of Balak] [against Balaam], and he clapped his hands.

And said Balak to Balaam, “To curse my enemies [did I call you], but it’s clear, [you have blessed]—[only blessed them], these three times.

24:11 So now, [hasten back] [to your *own* place].

I had said I would richly [reward you]: [yet now it is clear], you've been denied by YHWH, such honor."

12 And replied Balaam to Balak, "[Is it not true] [that even your men]—[your messengers that] you did send *to* me, *to* them I said this:

13 "If he offered me—if Balak should give—the fill [of his house], of silver and gold, [I would not] [be able to go] against the word of YHWH, [to do anything], [either good] or bad, [from my own heart]. [end aliyah] What is spoken by YHWH, that I will speak.

14 [And so now], I am about to go to my people.

But first [I must] [advise you] of what will be done [by this people] [of whom we speak] [to *your* people], in future days."

15 He took up his *mashal* (parable, proverb) and said, "The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, sayings of the man who is open-eyed.

16 [The oracle] [of him who hears] sayings of God (*El*), who knows [what is known] [by the Most High].

The vision of *Shaddai* (the Almighty) he beholds, [bowed down], with unveiled eyes.

17 [I see him], but not now. [I behold him], but not [in time close].

There goes forth a star [from Jacob]; there rises a meteor from Israel that pierces the temple of Moab, and the crown [of all the children of Seth].

18 It will be that Edom [shall be dispossessed], [and there will also] [be dispossessed]: Seir, [by its enemies].

And Israel shall be triumphant (*or*: does deeds of valor).

19 [There comes forth a victor] from Jacob, to wipe out what survived from the city."

20 [He then saw] Amalek. He took up his *mashal* [and said this], "First of the nations was Amalek, but his end is eternal destruction."

21 He then saw the Kenites. He took up his *mashal* [and said], "Secure is your settlement, and set in the rocks is your nest.

22 When the time has come, [He will lay waste] to Cain (the Kenites). [Until when] will Assyria hold you captive?

23 He took up his *mashal* [and said this]: "[Alas, alas!] (*or*: [Oy, oy, oy!]) Who can survive, except it be willed by God (*El*)?

24 [Ships come] from the land of the Kittites. [They lay low Assyria]; [they lay waste to Eber]. [They too], will arrive at destruction."

25 [And got up] Balaam. [He set out], and returned to his place. [And also Balak] went on his way.

25:1 When Israel was staying [at a place called Shittim], there started the people [whoring after] the daughters of Moab.

2 They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate, [and bowed down] to their gods.

25:3 Attached became Israel to Baal Peor, and there flared the wrath of YHWH [against Israel].

4 And said YHWH to Moses, “Seize all the leaders of the people [and impale them]—[let them be hanged]—[before YHWH], facing the sun, [so that there might withdraw] the flaring wrath of YHWH from Israel.

5 Then said Moses to the judges of Israel, “[You must kill], [each man], [those of his people] [who attached themselves] to Baal Peor.

6 [It was around this time] [that a man] from the children of Israel [came into view], [and brought forth] [to his kinsmen] [a Midianite woman], in the sight of Moses and in the sight [of the whole community] of Israel, just as [they were weeping] at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.

7 [And this was seen] by Pinchas [son of Eleazar], [son of Aaron] the priest.

[He rose up] from the midst of the assembly, [holding a spear] in his hand.

8 [And he came after] the man of Israel [into the chamber] (*kubbah*), and he stabbed [the two of them], both the man of Israel and the woman, in her groin (*kevah*), [and thus held back] was the plague from *B'nei Yisrael*.

9 [And it was] [that those who died] in the plague [end aliyah] were four and twenty [thousand people].

Len Fellman's English readings with tropes

The purpose of this project is to translate *THE SONG OF THE TORAH* into English.

I work by comparing as many as ten English translations of a *pasuk* and creating a cantillated English sentence that sounds as much as possible like the Hebrew. They follow the Hebrew as closely as possible, word for word and trope by trope. The English language has an amazing flexibility, making it possible to make the English word order match that of the Hebrew quite well, allowing for some “poetic licence”, and some willingness on the part of the listener to be “carried” by the melody more than by the English syntax. The translation needs to sound good when *chanted*, but not necessarily when *spoken or read*.

Unlike most translations, these “transtropilations” are not intended to be a substitute for the Hebrew. On the contrary, they are meant to provide a “window” into the Hebrew text and its musical expression. My ideal listener knows enough Hebrew and has enough interest to follow the Hebrew in a bilingual text while the *leyner* is chanting the English version, to bring the Hebrew text to life, both *verbally* and *musically*. For this purpose I use *exactly* the same tropes in the English as in the Hebrew (almost always on the corresponding English word).

The texts can be used to do **consecutive translation**, i.e. leyning a phrase in Hebrew, followed by the corresponding phrase sung in English. Some of my recordings demonstrate this. I do this frequently when leyning for groups that either know little Hebrew, or that don't have a *chumash* in front of them.

I favor literal translations (e.g. “cut a covenant”) to call attention to Hebrew idioms, and towards simpler (even if less accurate) words (e.g. Ex. 12:7 “beam above the door” rather than “lintel”) to be easier to follow. If my readings provoke a discussion of the Hebrew, I consider that as justification for using less-than-idiomatic English. I try to find just the right balance between “literalness” and “listenable-ness”. A primary goal is throwing light on the Hebrew syntax.

In order to adapt the trope symbols to a left-to-right language like English, I *reversed* the direction of the trope symbols:

mercha tipcha munach tevir mapakh or yetiv kadma or pashta geresh gershayim telisha katana telisha gedola

(Generally speaking the *conjunctive tropes* such as mercha, munach, mapakh, kadma, and telisha katana “lean toward” the words they “conjoin” to, while the *disjunctive tropes* such as tipcha, geresh, gershayim, and telisha gedola “lean away” from the words that follow, so as to create a sense of separation.)

The trope symbol is normally placed under the accented syllable, unless it is a *pre-positive* accent (telisha gedola, placed *at the beginning* of the word or phrase) or a *post-positive* one (telisha katana or pashta, placed *at the end* of the word or phrase).

The Hebrew text frequently puts a *makkeph* (which is like a hyphen) between words in order to treat them as a single word to be chanted. I use a different system for English: If an entire English phrase is to be chanted to a single trope melody, I place it between grey brackets, as in this phrase from the Book of Lamentations:

[clings to her skirts] 

The *leyner* is invited to fit this phrase to the *Eicha* “rivi'i” melody in whatever way seems most natural.

As a variant of the “grey bracket” device, I indicate the following pairs of tropes by “wrapping them around” the phrase which will have the combined melody:

mercha/tipcha	kadma/geresh (or: azla, etc.)	mercha siluk
Renew our days,	‘She weeps bitterly’.	a fire-offering to God

Again, the *leyner* should decide on the most natural way to fit the phrase to the combined trope melody.

I put words in gray which I consider essential but which don’t strictly match the Hebrew. I also “pad” some phrases with extra words in gray to fill out a musical phrase nicely. Different trope systems vary widely in the length of the musical phrase used, so the words in gray may or not be used depending on the leyner’s cantillation system. In particular, the tropes *telisha g’dola* (Q), *legarmeh*, *metigah-zakef*, and *pazer* vary widely in the musical phrases used for chanting. (And please indulge me in my whimsical treatments of *shalshelet*.)

“*Metigah-zakef*” is a special trope combination which can be recognized by a *kadma* and a *zakef* *katon* appearing on the same Hebrew word (again, a *makkeph* makes two words into one). (There are several examples in Genesis 18 & 19, beginning with 18:16). I indicate this by placing the corresponding English phrase in grey brackets:

[Take heed—take care for yourself]

In some trope systems (notably cantor Moshe Haschel in “Navigating the Bible II”) this is given a very distinctive melody—for which purpose extra syllables fill out the musical phrase (as in “take care” in this example). Haschel’s system also chants the trope *munach* as *legarmeh* more often than other systems do.

I don’t write a single word of translation without first hearing the melody of the phrase in my mind, following one of two trope systems: The one by Portnoy and Wolff (*The Art of Cantillation*) or the one by Joshua R. Jacobson (*Chanting the Hebrew Bible*).

I transcribe the name  as YHWH (in small caps). I almost always chant this as *yud-hey-vav-hey*, which I have discovered fits marvelously into several of the trope melodies. But of course the leyner can choose to pronounce it as “God” or “Adonai”.

The English translations I mostly use (besides several scholarly commentaries) are the following:

Aryeh Kaplan, ‘The Living Torah’ (1981) (also my source for proper names & transliterations)
Richard Elliott Friedman, ‘The Bible With Sources Revealed’ (2003)
Everett Fox, ‘The Five Books of Moses’ (1997)
The Stone Edition ‘Tanach’ (1996)
JPS ‘Hebrew-English Tanach’, (2nd Ed. 2000), *along with Orlinsky, ‘Notes on the New Translation of the Torah’* (1969)
Robert Alter, ‘The Five Books of Moses’ (2004)
Commentaries in the ‘Anchor Bible’ series
Rotherham, The Emphasized Bible (1902)
The Jerusalem Bible (1966) (also my source for topic headings)
The New King James Bible (1982)